

Interview Transcript

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Interviewee: Sister Kathleen Mary McCarthy

Interviewer: Shannon Green, Director, CSJ Institute, Mount Saint Mary's University; Kelby Thwaits, Instructor, Film and Television, Mount Saint Mary's University; Mary Trunk, Instructor, Film and Television, Mount Saint Mary's University; Laura Townsend, Production Coordinator, CSJ Institute.

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Transcribed By: Nancy Steinmann

[00:00:00.00] [Director's comments].

[00:00:21.20] INTERVIEWER: Would you tell us your full name and your age?

[00:00:24.29] SISTER KATHLEEN MARY MCCARTHY: My name is Sister Kathleen Mary McCarthy. I'm a Sister of St. Joseph of Carondelet, and as of this month I'm eighty-three, but by the end of the month I'll be eighty-four.

[00:00:38.12] INTERVIEWER: Sister Kathleen, where were you born and where did you grow up?

[00:00:42.26] SISTER KATHLEEN MARY MCCARTHY: I was born in San Francisco. I have a twin brother. I was born two months early--my most prompt act. And I went to Star of the Sea school, and was educated by the Sisters of St. Joseph. My parents were born in Ireland, so I have Irish roots and all that that means, which is fun, faith and creativity.

[00:01:12.15] INTERVIEWER: San Francisco is home to a pretty large Irish Catholic community. Is that your experience?

[00:01:15.02] SISTER KATHLEEN MARY MCCARTHY: Yes. Yes. Very much so.

[00:01:20.16] INTERVIEWER: You have a twin brother. Any other family members?

[00:01:23.12] SISTER KATHLEEN MARY MCCARTHY: I have an older sister--thirteen months older, and I have another brother who died when he was a baby--so there were four of us, but really three of us.

[00:01:34.28] INTERVIEWER: And what did your parents do for a living?

[00:01:36.02] SISTER KATHLEEN MARY MCCARTHY: They came from Ireland in the late--they were married in '29, and that was the beginning of the Depression--and my father worked in many different jobs. My birth certificate shows he had two or three jobs. But in the end he worked for the Municipal Railway in San Francisco, which was fun--fun for me to hear his stories. And my mother never worked. She was a homemaker.

[00:02:00.29] INTERVIEWER: What neighborhood of San Francisco?

[00:02:03.12] SISTER KATHLEEN MARY MCCARTHY: In the Richmond--close to St. Ignatius' Hospital--but St. Ignatius' church, but in Star of the Sea parish. That's where I went to school.

[00:02:13.04] INTERVIEWER: And when did you know that you wanted to become a Sister of St. Joseph?

[00:02:18.03] SISTER KATHLEEN MARY MCCARTHY: I don't know if the answer is "when did you know". "When did you first think about it" would be something else. When I was in the first grade, I had this old Sister--her name was Sister Serena [??]. And she left--and I was in trouble in the first grade. I was in trouble all through school. But she made God real. We had parties and we had to sit in half our seat and save some popcorn for our guardian angel--that was vivid for me, that she had us sit and put the popcorn over here. So her sense of God was real. But my parents' sense of God was even more real. But she was strict, and somehow there was something about her spirit that struck me. But I wasn't somebody that they thought I

was going to be a Sister all my life--that didn't happen, that people thought, "Oh, she's going to be a nun". In fact, there was shock when I became a nun. But I loved--yeah, I loved school and loved the Sisters and I loved having fun.

[00:03:30.14] INTERVIEWER: So when did you enter the Sisters of St. Joseph?

[00:03:32.20] SISTER KATHLEEN MARY MCCARTHY: I entered in September 15, 1950, and my parents were not in favor of it at all. My mother--the only reason my mother let me go is that she thought if God wanted me she didn't want to be on the bad side of God. So it was fear of God that--because I, you know, you go through a process and all these clothes came--black cloths to make for your--to become a postulate, and she didn't want to look at them. She goes, "Put them under your bed." And now it's getting later, and later, and later, and the nuns call me and said, "Are you still coming?" And I go, "Oh, yeah, I'm coming." And my mother let me go because if God wanted me she didn't want to be on the bad side of God. So that was her motivation. Even though--after I got in she'd phone me and beg me to come home for my eighteenth birthday. She phoned me--it took her about seven years to really resign herself that I was going to stay.

[00:04:29.07] INTERVIEWER: So you had to leave your home as--right after high school, is that what--?

[00:04:34.15] SISTER KATHLEEN MARY MCCARTHY: I graduated from high school in June and I entered in September. And you know you look back at that and you say it's God's grace. Because I--when I went to the, you know, the--not the airport--when they--we went on the train, and I have a twin brother--[pats chest, crying]--and if I had seen him crying, I don't know. But you know, I wanted to go. My mother and father were against it. My sister and brother thought it was weird. My mother thought I'd be home in six weeks, and you know--this is kind of funny--you had to bring a lot of stuff. And we wore men's t-shirts for underwear. We had a lot of them. And when people came to visit she brought them in and said, "I want you to see what she's bringing. And her brother can wear them when she comes home." [laughs]. She swore I wasn't going to stay. But, yeah--but it's God's grace, you know. I wanted to go and I loved my parents and I loved my family. But there's something stronger. And it wasn't easy. I think, you know, it's grace. Because now I look back--she phoned me and begged me to come home for my eighteenth birthday--it had all these sad things happen--and I still hung in. Not because--but because I thought this is what God wanted me to do. So my story's not that exotic, but it's real.

[00:06:30.19] INTERVIEWER: Do you have any memories from those early days as a postulant or as a novice?

[00:06:35.00] SISTER KATHLEEN MARY MCCARTHY: [laughs]. Yes, I do. We were fifty postulants--the largest group that ever entered, in 1950, and we were all wild. You know, I came from a crazy high school in San Francisco and my class has--still has a reputation of being crazy and doing wild things. When I entered, I looked around the room and I thought, "They're just like my class!" So we were--we were over--and if you talk to people in the community now they go, "Oh yeah." There was this kind of--we were over--they were overwhelmed because we were so noisy and wild. But I have--I have--you know it's all about God's grace, you know. You know, the postulate and the novitiate--I had a great novice director who--Sister Roseanne [Bromham (-1990)?]--who tapped something in each of us that had to do with extravagant generosity about saying "yes" to God--about everything. And so that was a great grace in my life, you know. And that "yes" is still part of my life. [smiles].

[00:07:47.14] INTERVIEWER: What about some of the women you entered with. Are you--do you still have some friendships or memories of those Sisters you'd like to share?

[00:07:53.00] SISTER KATHLEEN MARY MCCARTHY: Well, the fifty of us that entered, I'm--and six of us entered from Star [of the Sea]--I'm the only one that stayed. I still have connections with the people I entered with. And we have--well, now we're all older--but yeah, we get together and have parties. And we felt bonded to them--there's a connection there--even after they left and married and you know I got to know their husbands and whatever, it was a bond there--a wonderful bond.

[00:08:27.18] INTERVIEWER: You know we talk about the charism today in these very specific kind of terms. But my understanding is that in the past that wasn't really the case. How would you have described

the CSJ spirit and how it might have been different from other communities?

[00:08:42.24] SISTER KATHLEEN MARY MCCARTHY: I thought human and friendly--those are my two words. Other comm[unities]--well, I grew up with the Sisters. But other congregation seemed more severe and more strict and more structured and not very human, and it didn't seem like it was fun to be a nun. And for the Sisters of St. Joseph I felt like--I mean I had them all through high school--grade school and high school--they were human. And really to tell you about my vocation--when I decided to be a Sister I didn't--I wasn't pious or any of that stuff. I felt like this: I thought Sisters have the capacity to bring joy to people like nobody else [cries].

[00:09:39.15] INTERVIEWER: That was--that what you hoped to do?

[00:09:42.27] SISTER KATHLEEN MARY MCCARTHY: [pats chest, crying]. That's what I want to do. I thought Sisters brought joy and love and hope to people like nobody else. And that's why I became a Sister. I said I wanted to do that too--when I entered--oh they didn't interview me because my mother was against me entering--so nobody interviewed me--so now I'm in. And so the postulant mistress calls me in and said, "You know, nobody interviewed you. So why are you here?" And I said, "You know, Sisters bring joy to people like nobody else I know and that's what I want to do with my life." [cries]. And she said, "Is that it?" And I said, "That's it." And she said, "Well, don't you love God?" And I said, "No. But I want to." And I [unintelligible] gone back to that, how honest I was at seventeen. Because everybody said they loved God. I didn't know what that meant. I'm still learning what that really means. [cries]. Oh this is going to be terrible pictures.

[00:10:39.04] INTERVIEWER: No, it's good, it's good. Tell us about--did--you became a student at the Mount as a Sister--a Sister student?

[00:10:48.27] SISTER KATHLEEN MARY MCCARTHY: Well, my first mission was Madera--central California. I was there for six years. And so you didn't go to the Mount on the weekends--you went during the summer. But you have to know what the Mount was like for the summer. It was like vacation for us, because you know we had--our life was very structured--silence at meals and all that stuff. And going to the Mount was like a party. Because I was a Chemistry major--if you were going to believe that--and I loved the Sisters--some of the Sisters at the Mount, the older Sisters, who weren't [gestures air quotes] "professors"--they were there. I don't know, Sister Berenice [Coyne?]-Sister Euphrasia [Marin?]-they were--worked in the kitchen--Sister Dolorine [Sister Mary Dolorine Saloman (1913-2001)?]. There was something they had that I thought was extraordinary. Even though I took Chemistry from Sister Cecilia Louise [Moore (1928-2004)]--Father O'Reilly [Monsignor James Donald O'Reilly (1916-1978)]--I loved all that--but these other Sisters were--they were helpers there. I never made any distinction--I just thought they were great women and they were good to us. And so I loved the Mount. I mean, it took me a long time to graduate. But going there was like a picnic--in the summertime--everybody loved it, and you could--you know, I--because I was a Chemistry major they told me I only could swim once a day. You know, you can swim in the afternoon and at night, I could--because I had all these studies. But it was great. The Mount was like a party every summer. And there was--hundreds of nuns. And then your friends were with you, so it was great. It was fun. It's a long time ago, and it's a very different world--but it was great.

[00:12:28.14] INTERVIEWER: You mentioned a few of the Sisters. Are there any other Sisters that you remember that you want to mention? We're trying to capture as many names as we can.

[00:12:35.25] SISTER KATHLEEN MARY MCCARTHY: Oh Sister Berenice. And she used to work with the boarders. And Sister Dolorine was in the kitchen. And I picked them out--they were not professors, although I had Father O'Reilly and Sister Alice Marie [Cheap (1906-1984)]--and I was a Chemistry major--they were all great. Sister [Mary] Laurentia [Digges (1910-1991)] for English, and Dr. [Ord]--he was the first person who taught me History that made me like History. It was during the Vietnam War, and we--and there was a very conservative senior Sister who was against the war. She had all this printed material. I was debating the war--I got all her material--I got an "A" on the debate. She came to the debate. I debated Dr. Ord on the Vietnam War. But Sister--Sister Anna Marcella [??] was her name--she gave me the material. It was great fun--great fun. And Dr. Ord made you think. You know, I hated History, because it was a bunch of--cough up the dates--cough up the--and I thought, boring--but he made it interesting.

[00:13:45.06] INTERVIEWER: Tell us a little bit about being in Madera--St. Joachim's?

[00:13:48.06] SISTER KATHLEEN MARY MCCARTHY: Oh, I was there for six years. And it's a farm country. And it's twenty [unintelligible] miles from San Francisco, so my mother and father could drive down and visit me. Now you have to know my parents--you know, did not have a party--they did have a party when I entered--but they didn't have a party because they were happy. After I got on the train people came back to the house and had drinks and whatever. But they weren't happy. But they came to Madera. And she always brought food--and we always had food. And it was nice that they--that we could visit et cetera. And I lived with some wonderful Sisters--Sister [Alphonsus ??] was the oldest Sister. She was from Fresno--wonderful, wonderful person--happy--she was from Fresno. Her mother was born in Italy. And she was a great influence in my life. She was happy, easy--she raised roses--she loved flowers. And she loved the poor, and so people gave her cases of beans that she would put in the basement and save for the "knights of the road" [hobos]--so we fed the knights of the road. I loved it. It was a great way to begin your religious life--to have somebody like that, who was not--she was just wonderfully happy. And wasn't narrow--you know, she didn't take care of the poor because she was saying to you, "You need to do that." She took care of the poor because she loved them. And they came--the knights of the road came to the house and they'd fix the roses and she would feed them. It was wonderful--a wonderful experience for me.

[00:15:32.04] INTERVIEWER: What's the "knights of the road"?

[00:15:34.18] SISTER KATHLEEN MARY MCCARTHY: Well, you know, Madera is a--the train came through Madera and Fresno, and people--what do you call the people who ride the rails?

[00:15:43.23] INTERVIEWER: Oh, like a--you call them a "hobo".

[00:15:48.04] SISTER KATHLEEN MARY MCCARTHY: Hobos, right. Well, there's another name. But--so they came through--those were the people that worked in our yard. And she became their good friend and then we fed them and for me it was like, this is what Sisters are supposed to do. So it was a wonderful way to begin, I think, to have somebody like Sister [Alphonsus] and the knights of the road.

[00:16:08.29] SISTER KATHLEEN MARY MCCARTHY: What were your students like in Madera?

[00:16:12.11] INTERVIEWER: Oh wonderful. It's a farm country. I taught--I started out with fifth and sixth grade, then it was fourth and fifth grade, then fifth and sixth grade, and seventh grade--so I was there six years. It was--the people were wonderful. You know I taught dancing--folk dancing--to the--you know we had a big fiesta every year, and the fifth and sixth and seventh grade boys hated it but they all learned how to dance these little things. The people were warm and wonderful. And there's a man in San Francisco owns a flower shop, and he was in my first class. And I visit him when I go visit my family. So they were very warm and friendly and unsophisticated. But they were really interested in school, you know--they did well. But it was--I loved it--I loved the people. It was great.

[00:17:10.09] INTERVIEWER: Like many Sisters you were a teacher for many years--

[00:17:13.21] SISTER KATHLEEN MARY MCCARTHY: I was and I loved it. I cried when I had to leave the classroom. I loved teaching. I felt like this is who I am. I was teacher, and then I was also principal--but I taught when I was principal. I think I couldn't be a principal all by itself. I thought I would miss teaching. So I loved the school. But then I had other things happen in my life as a Sister--in terms--asked to do other things.

[00:17:41.03] INTERVIEWER: Yeah, and we'll talk about that. You went to Washington to teach as well?

[00:17:47.10] SISTER KATHLEEN MARY MCCARTHY: I went to--two things in Washington. I was principal of a school in Washington in St. Patrick's parish, and then years later I came back and worked in the hospital and was in charge of mission--which doesn't mean--means you work with the employees to let them know working in the hospital is not just a job, it's a mission. And all of us get to--you know, I think we're here to make the invisible God visible--by the way we act, by the way we treat people--and that's what I believed in

the hospital--I still believe that in schools. So, yeah, Pasco [Washington] is a very special place for me.

[00:18:23.27] INTERVIEWER: I've never been there. Can you tell us more about what--in terms of the province, of the Sisters--what Pasco is like?

[00:18:30.01] SISTER KATHLEEN MARY MCCARTHY: Well, Pasco was not part of the province in the beginning. The Sisters of St. Joseph from Philadelphia came out to Lewiston [Idaho]. So Pasco and Lewiston were kind of like the hinterlands. And--so they weren't like the center. But I went to a general chapter once--I talk so much about Pasco--some of the Sisters from the other province thought Pasco was a center of our province. But it's a small town, with 25,000. And we had a school and we have a hospital there. And you know, we still have the hospital there, but not the--and I think--well some of our--a boy--a man I taught has a daughter who teaches the fourth grade there--because the families were large and wonderful and the school became like the hub. It was great fun--great fun. And had to do with faith and fun and of course the students, and also I was young, and we didn't have very much money so we became very creative in how we made the school grow.

[00:19:42.06] INTERVIEWER: You have any examples of some of those--

[00:19:45.14] SISTER KATHLEEN MARY MCCARTHY: Well, when I was there, there--the school--I went there and taught--I was missioned to teach the ninth grade. And I was teaching fifty-six eighth graders in Reseda. And now I'm going to Pasco to teach fourteen? And sometimes you think, did I do something wrong? Or why? And there was these fourteen ninth graders--boys and girls--and I thought--and they didn't want to be there either, but their parents made them go to Catholic school. But I made an impact on them, and the next year we had thirty in the ninth grade. It was just--I can't even explain how much fun it was, and how different it was. The school had been--we had a pastor who was--he could talk to people over eighty and under six. But he liked me, and he was not a leader. But I--we had broken windows all over the school. Now I was named principal, and I counted the broken windows. I said, "We have seventy broken windows. You know what happens when you have seventy broken windows? Other people come by and say, 'Good, let's break more windows.' So we've got to fix these windows. And you've got to help me pay for them." So fixed the windows, and the school grew in numbers and yeah, it was great fun. I loved it. I cried when I was left--when I was changed--changed to come down here to do something in governance.

[00:21:21.13] INTERVIEWER: Well, let's talk a little bit about--that probably coincided with Vatican II, and some of the changes?

[00:21:27.05] SISTER KATHLEEN MARY MCCARTHY: Vatican II was '68, '69, '70. I left Pasco in '70. I was named regional superior. I didn't--we won't go into--oh well, you probably want to go into that. I didn't know what that meant. I was so happy being a principal and teaching a school and in a parish. And we had this change in governance, so I find myself--I was thirty-seven--and I'm now a regional superior on the provincial council--and I go, "I wonder what all this means?" And it was difficult for me. I cried--not because I was a councilor, I cried because I missed kids, and I missed school and I missed--you have some automatic things--that you know what you're doing. So it was a time of change. It wasn't an easy time for the community. And there was a lot of division in the community. It was a time--we changed the habit. It was a time--you know, my best friends left the community during that time. And I was on a council that no Sister on the council had friends leave--so I felt they didn't understand. You know, most of them ended up getting married--I was happy about that. But it was hard--it was hard. And I didn't cry--it was just hard. I felt like I was two people, because they would be talking about all these people leaving. They would also be talking about--that some people drank wine. Of course, in my heart I was going, "Something's wrong here--because I drink wine." And I don't want to act like I don't drink wine, and I don't want to--they talked about it like it was the worst thing you could do. So I felt very torn. I love the community, and I loved--though community service was difficult, especially at a time when people were labeled "bad" or "good", and that you were "with God" or "with the community" or "not with the community". So it was a very tough time after Vatican II and you know, one of my friends who left, who entered with me--I remember them saying, "Oh, we could tell she was leaving by the way she was dressed." I would find--that was so insulting to me. But it was a time when people were feeling very uneasy about what was happening in the Church, what was happening in the community--and so you cling to what's going to give you security. Well, my security was never the habit--even though I loved our habit. I didn't become--I remember teaching--the novice director saying, "The habit

doesn't make the monk." You know, and then, the habit was--what habit of Christ do you put on--if you're going to be a Sister? And I mean, only gradually did that come clear about mission. We're here to make the invisible God visible, by how we act, how we serve, how we love, how we pray, and you don't have to measure it. You just live it. But that was not where we were in 1970. And it--I don't have any anger about the people who were in charge--about the people who were the "good guys" or the "bad guys". It was just part of something that was painful. And I happened to be in religious governance at that time. And I was young myself. And so there was all this division. But you know it's all proof of God being present, you know. Struggle--I think of the election today [2016 US Presidential election]--and prayed this morning for the new governance, and said, you know, God's in charge. God can write straight with crooked lines. He's good at it. [laughs].

[00:25:26.21] INTERVIEWER: What else about Vatican II impacted you, in terms of the broader changes in the church?

[00:25:34.10] SISTER KATHLEEN MARY MCCARTHY: Well, personally, in terms of the Sisters of St. Joseph--1969 we have this "Consensus Statement". And I fell in love with it. Because I remember going to a talk in Spokane and this Sisters said, "If you don't know your charism, you're not going to make it in the future." Now I was probably thirty-five or thirty-six, so I went up to her and said, "I don't know what you're talking about. You know, being a Sister, it means you pray, you're in ministry, you live in community--what are you talking about?" And she goes, "Oh, the spirit of your community." And I--she didn't answer me--I mean, I didn't feel like oh, I really get it. But I fell in love with the history of the community and the charism, especially the Consensus Statement. Because the Consensus Statement says it's not what you do--you know, stimulated by the Holy Spirit of Love, the Sister of St. Joseph--[cries]--moves always towards profound love of God and of neighbor, without distinction, from whom she does not separate herself, and whom in the service of the neighbor she works to promote unity and reconciliation--unity with neighbor and neighbor with God [sic]. I thought--what I thought about was--we're going to be here a long time, because to work for unity with neighbor and neighbor and neighbor with God is not like you're saving the slaves. You could save the slaves and it will be finished. You could teach the fifth grade and it will be over. But to take for your mission that you are going to reconcile neighbor with neighbor and neighbor with God, as a life mission--then I said, we're going to be here a long time. It was--I fell in love with it. And also, I thought--not only in love with the idea, but also the challenge of how difficult it is to live it every day. Do I--am I a healer? Am I someone who helps people get along? Do I reach out so that I get along with other people? And I also believe, you know--John's Gospel--John's Gospel chapter sixteen says, Jesus said, praying to the Father, may they all be one as you and I are one. That's it. That's it. I mean, that's what our country is saying today--may we in some way be one. And I know we talk about being one, and I think some people misinterpret it. It doesn't mean we're all equal, we all look alike, that we all think alike--one is deeper than that--much deeper than that. One means the barriers are gone, and we see each other as brothers and sisters. So that's--[cries]--important to me.

[00:28:32.15] INTERVIEWER: You mentioned Vatican II was a good time to--you know, for communities to go back and renew.

[00:28:38.27] SISTER KATHLEEN MARY MCCARTHY: Yeah. We didn't do it right away. Because, you know, it was so shocking. The habit--changing the habit was so divisive. You know, I lived in Pasco, so--small town. We all--the other Sisters in the house--we had no money. We went--there was a shoe store in town that said if you buy two pairs of shoes you get one pair free. So we took--you bring in two pairs of shoes--so we collected all our "nunny" shoes and brought them into the shoe store. And we got--and we didn't have money in the house. So we had one dress, made from our habit, and then on Friday we washed it. I mean--but we didn't mind. We thought it was great--we thought it was great. It was a time--and I was glad that we were in a small town--we got to talk to the parents and to the students. I taught the ninth grade, and the first day in school you take off your coat and you feel like you're in your underwear in front of your class. And the boys are all there looking at you. Only one of them--they all looked down--all the boys looked down. There was--they were afraid to look at you. Now you look like a woman. But one boy in class goes, "I like it!" [laughs]. It was hysterical. And then some mothers came to school and said, "You know I have three kids in the school. They all told me you have a different color hair, so I had to come and find out what really it was." So--but it was a--it wasn't like city life, it was different. And I feel like I was lucky that I was with this community of people who loved us. And you know, some of them didn't want us to change. But they loved

us for who we are and what we did. And--yeah, we went through a lot of rugged times after that. I mean, not lost our way, but we didn't do--there wasn't--I don't think we did a great job of catechizing each other in the Church about what Vatican II meant. Because Vatican II was a deepening of living the Gospel--of meeting who Jesus is. That meant make Christ visible in the world. But you know, the habit--I loved our habit. I loved it. And I loved everything it stood for. And--even though, you know, Sisters felt bad that you [changed]--I remember coming to LA and one Sister saying, "Oh not you too!" And I didn't know what she was talking about. I go, "What? What?" She goes, "You changed." I go, "I did. I did and it's okay. I'm still the same Kathleen Mary and you're still the same Anna Marcella [??]. We're still good Sisters." You know, but it was tough. And it was divisive and you know, wow, this will make you laugh. One provincial said, well you can wear--oh, she said, what--my mother brought me material and somebody made a dress. And the provincial said, "What color is this?" I go, "Navy blue." And she goes, "I wouldn't want it any bluer--any lighter than that. I don't want any electric blue." And I thought, what the heck is "electric blue"? [laughs]. But, you know, it was a time. You just--it's like a long time ago. And I know that anybody who studies social change--I haven't--but incrementally is usually better than radical. So some Sisters weren't--you know it was very wise of the prov--of the congregation to say you could change when you wanted to. Now, I, looking back, I think--if I was in the congregational leadership I would have said--this was 1968, '69--I would have said, "By 1979 everybody has to have made a decision about change." Because we had Sisters in the habit--we still have Sisters in the habit--and I feel like we're being very respectful. I think that's our charism, that we're not telling people they have to do this, have to do that. But I think in the long run, from hindsight, because people thought the "good guys" and the "bad guys"--there aren't good guys and bad guys--they're just Sisters. Okay, I think I'm going on and on...

[00:33:03.04] INTERVIEWER: No, that's all very helpful--very good--

[00:33:06.03] KELBY THWAITS: It's wonderful.

[00:33:06.18] INTERVIEWER: Wonderful. Is there anything else you want to talk--you were in leadership for a number of years--you were superior--any other thoughts?

[00:33:12.12] SISTER KATHLEEN MARY MCCARTHY: Sixteen years. Oh I was a local superior before I got into governance. I was shocked--you know, I was young. I could hardly believe that I was going to be a regional superior--didn't even know what it meant--and on the council. But you know it's a privilege to be in service. It was a time of a lot of division. And for a while people didn't like superiors. [laughs]. We were the bad guys. But I learned. I learned a lot. You know, I was provincial when the Sisters signed the ad in the New York Times for abortion [Catholics For Free Choice. 1984, October 7. "A diversity of opinions regarding abortion exists among committed Catholics: A Catholic statement on pluralism and abortion" (advertisement). New York Times.] And I had to go to St. Louis [Missouri], and people came from Rome and all that stuff--

[00:33:59.23] INTERVIEWER: What was--would you tell us a little more about that?

[00:34:02.11] SISTER KATHLEEN MARY MCCARTHY: You know [Sister] Judy Vaughan? She signed an ad in the New York Times that looked like she was in favor of abortion. And really, her position was, is it possible that someone could have an abortion and it could be an ethical decision, for a particular person. But it became a divisive issue, and I happened to be in leadership, and had to go to St. Louis, and people came from Rome, and the people in the province were upset with me. My own council was upset with me. They wanted--Rome wanted to throw her out of the community, and I said, "I can't do that." So it was a hairy time. I learned a lot--I learned a lot. I mean, it was not easy, and I was--my council--I had a council who didn't agree with me. But I couldn't throw any Sister out of the--I learned a lot. I learned about--and my mother--my mother was alive at that time--no she had died--I prayed to my mother and said, "You won't like this issue, but get us out of this problem." And the day the letter went to Rome--[cries]--was her birthday. It was hard. It was hard even in the council. The council didn't agree. I couldn't let somebody go who was acting according to her conscience--who also was not pro-abortion. She wasn't pro-abortion--she was saying--but it--oh, we had--it was a big long thing and I had to go to Washington, I went to St. Louis, and the province was divided, and the council was divided, and I learned that--not only to trust God--but hang in. Don't come to a conclusion too soon. See, you know--so it was a very spiritual journey for me, but painful. And you know Judy didn't always agree with me either, but I kind of had a thread I was hanging

onto--it was faith in God and yeah. Other people were canonizing me because they canonized Judy, and--but I learned through that--hang in--trust yourself and trust God. And I've tried to live like that.

[00:36:29.19] INTERVIEWER: I think there's a maxim to that effect, is there not? "Do not get ahead of the grace."

[00:36:34.11] SISTER KATHLEEN MARY MCCARTHY: Yes. Don't anticipate. Right. Well, there's a lot of maxims that fit that, really. Yeah. So that--I happened to be in leadership during some rough times. And I always felt like it was a privilege to be in leadership. It was all about service. And I also--you get to be--the bad guys sometimes. And I think God helped me--God helped all of us really. Because I was in some kind of office for sixteen years. That's a long time. From 1970 to '86. And by the time '86 rolled around people were more together, you know.

[00:37:30.16] INTERVIEWER: It took time for the community to move past some of those divisions.

[00:37:35.04] SISTER KATHLEEN MARY MCCARTHY: Well, also think about politically, and Church. You know, I mean, John Paul II was not my favorite Pope. I felt--I loved John Paul I--he only lasted thirty days. I loved John XXIII. I loved the Vatican II documents. I--let the--windows were opened and things were not rigid. I think John Paul II did great things in the Church. But I--you know--God uses whoever's in charge, you know. And we're blessed now to have Francis [I, Jorge Mario Bergoglio], who's a compassionate, but he's also not afraid to speak the truth, you know--it's great. And who's got--you know--who has it in their hand that everything is right. No. And he says that too. And he's also someone who talks about forgiveness and mercy. So yes. Oh [grimaces].

[00:38:37.13] INTERVIEWER: You got to go to study for a couple of years at [unintelligible]. Tell me about that experience.

[00:38:43.04] SISTER KATHLEEN MARY MCCARTHY: After I got out of office, I wanted to go to Berkeley and study Theology. It was a great gift the community gave me. And I lived in a scuzzy apartment with cockroaches. The rent was \$228 a month, and it was a terrible apartment. But some Sister found it and I said--so I learned how to take care of cockroaches. I bought "roach motels" every week, and put them in the corners and collected the roaches. But I loved the study. And I had to walk up a hill to school. I had a car, but I walked to school every day, which was a mile and a half up a hill. I loved it. It was--when somebody said, "Do you have any regrets?" I wish I could have taken more Theology. It was life-changing for me. It was--I always felt like I had a focus in my life--but it clarified--it clarified why we're here, what missionary means, and it was--I mean it was--I loved it--just loved it. And I loved--you know, Berkeley is kind of crazy--and I walked to school, and you'd have all these people begging. So I always made sure I had money in my pocket so you could give people stuff. And yeah, it was wonderful. And I used to buy chicken legs by the dozen, because we didn't--I had--I tried to live on \$25 a week, but I also liked to have liquor, because you had visitors come over. And so it was very important that I had wine and something when people came to play. So I ate chicken every day--I had chicken legs. And you could buy a dozen chicken legs cheap. People said every day--I still like chicken legs. Anyway, it was wonderful for me. It was challenging, and I have a neighbor who was a man of color from Trinidad--we became good friends. He was--had been a Jesuit then he left, but he was a theologian, so we had these great discussions. So I felt like--it was life-changing for me, even though the novitiate was life-changing, being in office was life-changing--Theology was like throwing open windows and doors, and knowing about more, in the deepest kind of sense. Not more quantitatively, but more about how you live. I loved it.

[00:41:13.28] INTERVIEWER: Were there any theologians or--that you discovered at that time that really continued to influence you, or parts [unintelligible]--

[00:41:21.14] SISTER KATHLEEN MARY MCCARTHY: Oh my favorite theologian is Karl Rahner [S.J. (1904-1984)]. I'm not alone in that. And I wrote my thesis on the "Transformation of Catholic Institutions". And I loved my thesis. I have a copy of it. And I--it's not--well I did the history of institutions, but really--about how you make changes to institutions, and how institutions have to have a core--a core belief. It's not about the student body, the numbers, the money, it's about values, and how you translate those values into policies and practices and whatever. So I became--it was very important to me. The subject--I could hardly

believe that I took that subject. But I go back and read it, and the person of Jesus is the key to an institution--the person and values of Jesus and how they translate into your everyday life. It's not, you know--so that's--I still have it and I still read it and it's still who I am. [cries].

[00:42:35.26] INTERVIEWER: We'll want to make sure we have a copy of that for the CSJ Institute.

[00:42:40.03] SISTER KATHLEEN MARY MCCARTHY: Okay.

[00:42:40.07] INTERVIEWER: We're collecting all the theses. So--did that then lead you into mission effectiveness--mission--

[00:42:47.01] SISTER KATHLEEN MARY MCCARTHY: No, I just go where the community sent me. You know, I--oh no, first I went to the Mount for five years, to Doheny [campus]. I was Campus Minister. I was--I had an office in the Theology building. I felt like I did a little of this and that. I was Campus Minister. I taught the novices--religious novices--men and women. Some Theology--I did a little this and that. And I was there five years. I don't know whether I really became part of the Mount, though--I have to say that. You know, like, after that I went to Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, and then I went to Tucson [Arizona]. And when I went to Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital and Tucson, I felt I became a part of the institution. I never had that feel--and this is being honest--I never had that feeling about the Mount--that I was part of the brick and mortar of the Mount. Even though I loved the Mount--the jobs--I don't know whether I didn't take advantage of the opportunity--I mean, I did this mission thing and I taught some stuff, but when I went to the hospitals, I felt like I was part of the brick and mortar, and got to make the brick and mortar be part of Jesus' mission. I didn't feel that way when I was at Doheny. I was at Doheny--I loved--I lived in the upper room, with Sister Ann Joachim [Moore?] who was--I think she was eighty, and I might have been fifty-three. She was a great woman, and great mission--and really loved the Sisters--loved the Mount--she was a passionate CSJ. I never felt like I became like intimate in the college. I would have liked to have been. But it was a change at the college too. And I loved everything about it. But it wasn't like when I went to the hospitals--I became part of the brick and mortar of--and the spirit of the place. Now I understand, when I talk to your President [Ann McElaney-Johnson]--your president--[unintelligible] of the Mount, I feel like the Mount--the blood of the Sisters of St. Joseph runs through the Mount--that you have it. And it's not that you have it like a little box--you have it and it's growing, and flowing, and living, and breathing--and I celebrate that. [cries]. It makes me happy. It's just that you're not sponsored by the Sisters of St. Joseph--the life of the Sisters is part of your life. Okay, I'm right, yeah?

[00:45:29.19] INTERVIEWER: Yeah. Can you say a little more about working with the laity--in these institutions?

[00:45:37.24] SISTER KATHLEEN MARY MCCARTHY: Oh. That's who I [unintelligible] with most. I loved them. I loved running around--I'm just like a nut, you know, I mean, I'm still kind of a nut, but in the hospitals--you know in Tucson we had 2,000 employees and three hospitals. I just ran around like a nut. But God used me. And mission took root and people understood it. It wasn't something you learned, it's something you live. And you try to point it out--because you know, it's one thing to have a mission director. It's another thing to say, "It's right here--and right here--and right there--and it's right where we're--what's happening." It's not just I can cough up Mother St. John [Jeanne Fontbonne (1759-1843), second foundress of CSJs], and I can cough up Cahokia and all that stuff. It's like, it's right here--right here in this room. We're having a misunderstanding and living out the charism. Or we're--you know, I thought about the election, and prayed this morning, that God who can write crooked--write straight with crooked lines--can make whatever's going to happen in our country be for the good. That this man [President Donald J. Trump] who has insulted so many people with his bad language--that happened. Out of that ugliness can come something good. And I feel that way--and we're talking about institutions--I think--well, if I have any fear, it's that we let language take the place of spirit. You know, I know, St. Mary's--I worked at St. Mary's--I have a very peripheral job--we made peanut butter and jelly sandwiches for the hungry. I have a sniffer--you can smell it if it's real. And so that's my--if I have any fear at all, it's--I know we say all the right words now. And some places--that's what I loved about St. Mary's--they didn't know the whole story. They've been here a long time but we didn't have the sophistication other schools had--but we had something that was alive there. These are poor kids, a multicultural--and they cared about loving each other--and there was a sense of community. I used to think that that's a sign that God is present. And now we're doing a whole bunch of

stuff on charism--and this is going to sound negative--and everybody knows the story of Mother St. John Fontbonne and I think, it's great. But I have a concern. Don't make that a substitute for the real thing. [unintelligible]--oh they know the story, they know this, and they have pictures, they have whatever--I go, "Do you go there and feel like it's alive and people are caring about each other? And you see it in action?" So--but I think--you know, people tell me it's in action at the Mount, but it's a concern I've had as--now we have all these workshops and people come back with the right words--and I don't mean that I don't appreciate it. But if you don't get that other piece, you're missing it. I really feel strongly about that. If you can't--you know, if there are people you don't like, that's okay. Just don't treat them like you don't like them. If there's--I hope I'm making sense.

[00:49:08.10] INTERVIEWER: Yes.

[00:49:11.01] SISTER KATHLEEN MARY MCCARTHY: Because I think--this is a personal concern. That pretty soon everybody was talking about the charism, Mother St. John, et cetera, et cetera, and I said, "Oh I hope we just don't become a credit that I'm getting, and a degree I'm getting. It's not something that's in my heart." And that we realize that it's in the simple little things--it's in your prayer life--it's in the people you don't like--yes, everything. So I--[pats chest]. Thank you for letting me be honest. Well, I only want to be honest.

[00:49:50.24] INTERVIEWER: [unintelligible]. That's what we want too. Can we just one last--what's been your greatest joy in religious life?

[00:49:57.12] SISTER KATHLEEN MARY MCCARTHY: [cries]. That I'm a Sister--[unintelligible].

[00:50:03.15] INTERVIEWER: Can you try to say that again?

[00:50:07.08] SISTER KATHLEEN MARY MCCARTHY: [cries--pats chest]. That I'm a Sister of St. Joseph. That I'm a CSJ and that who we are--who we are called to be is so precious. Not precious for us to hold--precious for us to live. I mean--and I love the ordinariness in our charism. I know we talk about charism. It's the garden variety. We're turnips or radishes. Really. We're just ordinary. But we live it with heart. And you know Mother St. John--I love--she wanted us to be the congregation of the great love of God. That's a big item. To have great love of God. I told you that my inter--when they interviewed me they inter--did I love God--I said no, I didn't love God. And she was shocked. I didn't know what it meant. What does it mean to have great love of God? You mean you embrace everything--and nothing is insignificant--and everything counts. I believe in the sacramentality of life--that everything is tinged with God. And whether it's eating lunch or listening to a boring speaker, or listening to an inspiring speaker--everything is sacramental. And that, now as I get older--I'm getting older--I think, "Oh my God, Kathleen, you just don't have to get tight up about it. You just need to let go and live it with your whole heart." [cries].

[00:51:44.17] INTERVIEWER: Can I ask you to do one more thing when you feel you can? Can you start to say the consensus statement again, when you feel ready? Because I love that you have that pretty much committed to memory--

[00:52:00.16] SISTER KATHLEEN MARY MCCARTHY: [cries]. I do.

[00:52:01.28] INTERVIEWER: --and that would be I think a very--I'd love to have you recite--

[00:52:05.18] SISTER KATHLEEN MARY MCCARTHY: I don't know if I have the whole thing memorized--

[00:52:07.06] INTERVIEWER: That's okay. Just even what you can do.

[00:52:13.02] SISTER KATHLEEN MARY MCCARTHY: Stimulated by the Holy Spirit of Love, the Sister of St. Joseph--[cries]--moves always toward profound love of God and love of neighbor without distinction, from whom she does not separate herself, in the service of the neighbor, unity of neighbor and neighbor with God [sic]. And of course, in the end, in the spirit of St. Joseph, in gentleness peace and joy. I mean, that's not exactly complete, but the whole thing is--it initiates with God, you put your whole heart and soul into it, and God's going to use you. That's it. I just--I love it. And that was 1969 when I first came in contact with it--and

it still inspires me. And it should inspire all of us, because the initiator is God. And then I think, our charism-- I think about the election, and Trump and all that stuff--how we need reconciliation. And I remember thinking a long time ago--this is our char--you know, there was some kind of congregations that were founded to help slaves and help newborn babies. And ours was kind of out of the world. To foster reconciliation and unity--which is Jesus may they all be one. And it means it's never going to end. And it's little--like a little--the person you are irritated with, or you have to wait a little bit longer--or the big thing. You know, it's--I felt like, you know, we're going to--even though people wonder if we're going to have a future. I go, we have this charism that has a future. And has a future in me, and you, and you, and you [points]. In fact we're here just to foster oneness in the world. So--you know, I get carried away. [laughs].

[00:54:26.15] INTERVIEWER: That's wonderful. Was there anything else that you thought about that you wanted to share that I haven't asked you about? A story or memory of another Sister who maybe can't speak for herself anymore?

[00:54:48.28] SISTER KATHLEEN MARY MCCARTHY: Oh, I had a few Sisters down there. When I left the novitiate, Sister [Alphonsus ??] was in Madera, and she was in her last year of fasting, and I was in my first year of fasting. She was wonderful, and happy and joyful. And I think about her. I think about the Sister [Gertrude Joseph] Cook [(-1962)?] at the Mount, [Sister] Euphrasia and [Sister] Dolorine. I was attracted--you know, they weren't important people--whatever that means, because we are all important people--but they didn't have a title, they didn't have a special place--they inspired me. I used to think of Sister Dolorine who was a cook at the Mount and here, that she probably was the most apostolic Sister of St. Joseph--my prayer life--I go, I think she's the most apostolic--because she's given everything. And she's not ambitious for anything except the joy of making bread--she used to make bread--special bread. Those touch me. It wasn't about degree--I mean, you have to know--I have a degree in Chemistry--and when I finally got it, the provincial said, "You know Kathleen Mary, I don't think you're dignified enough to put you in high school." And I said, "You know, I don't think I'm motivated to be dignified." [laughs]. I don't know why they kept me. Really. My mother didn't want me to enter, but she said, "Even if you stay six months it will give you a little more dignity." I've been haunted by having a lack of dignity--even to this day. I think, "Oh, are you going to dress nice, Kathleen?" I go, "No I'm just going to dress what I wear every day." You know. But--I hope this was helpful. I think I'm a nut.

[00:56:41.10] INTERVIEWER: Very helpful.

[00:56:43.11] KELBY THWAITS: This was great. Could you start your statement again--my greatest joy?

[00:56:49.18] SISTER KATHLEEN MARY MCCARTHY: My greatest joy--

[00:56:50.21] KELBY THWAITS: Yes, and tell Shannon.

[00:56:51.18] SISTER KATHLEEN MARY MCCARTHY: [cries]. My greatest joy is that I've called to be a Sister of St. Joseph--and every day I'm called to live it--to live it with heart and joy and love. How lucky I am. It's a blessing. And you know--you know this--nobody--you're only--you know what blessing is? You never receive a blessing for yourself. You receive a blessing to be a blessing. To be a blessing and whatever that means. I think it might mean to bring a smile to someone's face, or a tear to their eye--or you know, I'm still recovering from the election. But I said to the Lord, you are in charge, and so you are going to bring something wonderful out of this--what I think is a disaster. Because you are going to call us--because of all the things that Trump said--to be kinder, more respectful, more conscious of how precious the human person is. Wouldn't that be great if that came out of this? Isn't this what the CSJ's are all about? I mean-- [cries]--thank you.

[00:58:34.20] KELBY THWAITS: That sounds wonderful. That's just wonderful.

[00:58:41.27] SISTER KATHLEEN MARY MCCARTHY: I'm so sorry I'm emotional.

[00:58:49.08] INTERVIEWER: [Director's comments.]

[00:59:37.07] End of interview.

Interview Index

Interview Date: 11/09/2016

Interviewee: Sister Kathleen Mary McCarthy

Interviewer: Shannon Green, Director, CSJ Institute, Mount Saint Mary's University; Kelby Thwaits, Instructor, Film and Television, Mount Saint Mary's University; Mary Trunk, Instructor, Film and Television, Mount Saint Mary's University; Laura Townsend, Production Coordinator, CSJ Institute.

Location: Carondelet Center, Los Angeles, California.

Transcription Date: 02/10/2017

Transcribed By: Nancy Steinmann

[00:00:00.00] [Director's comments].

[00:00:18.07] Full name and age: Sister Kathleen Mary McCarthy, age 83.

[00:00:38.23] Early life and family. Born San Francisco, CA, Richmond area. Twin brother. Attended Star of the Sea school. Parents born in Ireland. Older sister. Second brother died when infant. Parents married 1929. Father worked for Municipal Railway, mother housewife. Attended St. Ignatius Church.

[00:02:13.28] Early religious life and vocation. Sister Serena [??], first grade teacher influenced vocation. Parents religious. Not expected to be a Sister.

[00:03:28.21] Parents reaction to vocation. Entered CSJs Sept 15, 1950. Parents not in favor.

[00:04:30.00] Leaving home after high school. Wearing men's t-shirts for underwear. God's grace.

[00:06:31.29] Early religious life. Group of 50 postulants--largest group that ever entered CSJs. "Crazy and wild" class. Sister Roseanne [Bromham (-1990)?], postulant director. Generosity--saying "yes" to God.

[00:08:27.17] Charism and CSJ spirit in early days. Human and friendly. Taught by Sisters through grade and high school. Sisters bring joy and love and hope. Never interviewed for entry. Not knowing what loving God meant.

[00:10:41.07] Early missions. Madera, California for 6 years. Attended Mount in summer. "Like vacation". Mount staff Sisters: Sister Berenice [Coyne?]; Sister Euphrasia [Marin?], kitchen staff; Sister Dolorine [Sister Mary Dolorine Saloman (1913-2001)?]. Faculty: Sister Cecilia Louise [Moore (1928-2004)], chemistry; Father O'Reilly [Monsignor James Donald O'Reilly (1916-1978)].

[00:12:28.03] Other Sisters: Sister Berenice; Sister Dolorine; Father O'Reilly; Sister Alice Marie [Cheap (1906-1984)]; Sister [Mary] Laurentia [Digges (1910-1991)], English faculty; Dr. [Ord], history faculty. Vietnam War debate. Sister Anna Marcella [??].

[00:13:45.03] Mission at Madera--six years teaching at St. Joachim School. Visit from family. Living with Sisters: Sister [Alphonsus ??] from Fresno, feeding poor and "knights of the road" (hobos riding trains). Students at Madera--fourth through seventh grade. Teaching folk dancing.

[00:17:11.13] Teaching. Working as principal. Mission to Pasco, Washington state--principal in St. Patrick's Parish, later worked in hospital. "Making invisible God visible". Sisters of St. Joseph from Philadelphia in Lewiston, WA. Description of Pasco, WA. Creativity as necessity of minimum funds. Principal and teaching ninth graders. Fixing broken windows.

[00:21:23.01] Vatican II changes. Left Pasco in 1970, named Regional Superior at age 37. Divisions in community--Sisters leaving. Sisters and alcohol. Uneasiness about church and community. Change of habit. "Habit of Christ". "Making invisible God visible". 2016 Presidential election: "God can write straight with crooked lines".

[00:25:27.17] Vatican II--community and personal impacts. 1969 CSJ Consensus statement. Charism--"spirit of your community". Unity and reconciliation. Living charism every day. "Being one".

[00:28:32.29] Vatican II and renewal. Divisiveness of change of habit. Exchanging shoes. First day in school without habit. Visibility of hair. Sister Anna Marcella [??]. Color of modified habit.

[00:33:07.12] In leadership for 16 years (1960-1986). Provincial when Sisters signed New York Times ad re: abortion [1968]. Sister Judy Vaughan. Investigation by Rome. Learning to trust God and yourself. "Do not get ahead of the Grace." Privilege of service. Being "the bad guy".

[00:37:30.27] Politics of church. Popes John Paul I, John Paul II, John 23rd, Francis [Jorge Mario Bergoglio].

[00:38:36.04] Studying Theology at University of California Berkeley. Living on a budget. Theologian Karl Rahner [S.J. (1904-1984)]. Thesis on "Transformation of Catholic Institutions". Mission of institution: "Person and values of Jesus are the key".

[00:42:43.19] Five years at Doheny campus as Campus Minister, teaching novices Theology. Working at Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital. Moving to Tucson. Relationship with the Mount. Sister Ann Joachim [Moore?]. Charism of CSJs in the Mount.

[00:45:27.13] Working with laity. Idea of mission in hospitals. 2016 Presidential election. Fear that language will take the place of spirit and action at the Mount.

[00:49:54.13] Greatest joy in religious life: being a CSJ. Ordinary people with heart. Meaning of "love of God". Living with whole heart.

[00:51:53.16] CSJ Consensus statement. 2016 Presidential election and fostering reconciliation. Future of charism.

[00:54:27.10] Other reflections. Other Sisters: Sister [Alphonsus ??]; Sister [Gertrude Joseph] Cook [(-1962)]; Sister Euphrasia; Sister Dolorine. Perceived lack of dignity.

[00:56:45.18] Greatest joy statement. Blessings not for one's self. 2016 Presidential election. President Trump. [Director's comments].

[00:59:37.00] End of interview.